always sparrows
a haiku memoir
clive bennett

Foreword

When I set out to write this ebook I was determined to make it one you would want to read, again and again. I wanted it to expand your thinking; encourage you to observe the natural world in new ways; and ultimately take you on a journey of self-discovery — through the beauty of poetry and prose.

Written to take advantage of the advanced features of HTML5 (epub3) readers, with embedded birdsongs, music and video, the result is a groundbreaking, semi-autobiographical interactive ebook of haiku (and other japanese short-form poetry), that is imaginative intriguing and quite unique.

The birdsong recordings sourced from Xeno-Canto (a website dedicated to sharing bird sounds from all over the world), are used here under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs4.0 license. Those in the Appendix are from the original recordings by Ludwig Koch (1881–1974).

The front cover and coloured illustrations are from

woodblock prints by Ohara Koson (Ohara Hōson, Ohara Shōson Kanazawa 1877 – Tokyo 1945) who was a Japanese painter and woodblock print designer of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, at the forefront of shinsaku–hanga and shin–hanga art movement.

The photos on pages 17, 33, 51 and 53 were prepared by Miss Bertha Newcome, from her original paintings, and published in “Richard Jefferies A Study” by H S Salt 1883

All rights reserved. This ebook, or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express written permission of the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review. Any errors, omissions or inaccuracies, grammatical or otherwise, are entirely my own.

C.B. July 2025

Copyright © 2024

Just tap to get in touch

Foreword

always sparrows

My Creative Muse

Richard Jefferies 1848-1887

a haiku memoir

clive bennett

Dedicated to Colin Blundell (1937 - 2023)
~ a fellow traveller along the bye-ways of
'Jefferies Land', who unwittingly, first
sparked my interest in writing haiku ~

PART ONE
across the meadow

always sparrows

Sometimes, even before the first signs of greening in the hedges, there comes a few warm sunny days that tease and tempt us into dreaming of summer[1]; yet the harsh east winds are never far away. Richard Jefferies nailed this when he wrote …

"… a lark starts into the light and pours forth a rain of unwearied notes overhead. With bright light, and sunshine, and sunrise, and blue skies the bird is so associated in the mind, that even to see him in the frosty days of winter, at least assures us that summer will certainly return. …"

Out of Doors in February - 1882

[1] My mixtape (10 minutes) with ambient music by Amurich (an Ethno & Electronic musician from Murmansk) and the songs of skylark, song thrush, blackbird and cuckoo

across the meadow

across the meadow

Prologue

Easterton Village and Salisbury Plain

distant bells
across the fields
skylark song
lost in dreams of
summer skies

across the meadow

across the meadow

Scene of childhood memories by Alexandra Lynn Williams, Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. Watercolor pencil. Fifth Grade Art Class, Ms. Lindsay Mitchell, Mitchell Creek Art Gallery

Introduction

So starts my somewhat quirky, haiku story – a sort of poetic memoir. With an uplifting passage from Richard Jefferies, and a spiritual nod to to my maternal forebears who farmed in Easterton, The photo from a time when you only had to step outside the back door to hear the larks singing.

But how come I started writing haiku[2] – I wasn't a poet and didn't read poetry. Not since school anyway although the line 'we have no time to stand and stare' ('Leisure' W.H. Davies), had somehow stuck with me. I wasn't a writer either. But I loved reading. And had done from a very young age. Mum had lots of books. I discovered the North Pole,

messed about on the river, travelled to

2 You can skip hearing me wittering on about how I became a haiku poet and jump straight to reading my debut haiku collection if you like. Here's the link – among the driftwood. You can always come back later!

across the meadow

the centre of the earth, followed Alice down the rabbit hole and walked with Richard Jefferies up Liddington Hill – countless times …

It was quite by accident. I had picked up a book (more about that later) by Colin Blundell 'Something Beyond the Stars'[3]. I didn't know Colin from Adam (although I was to correspond with him subsequently – Colin that is).

Sadly I never got to meet him, but we shared a passion for the nature writing of Richard Jefferies. Colin believed that within Jefferies' eloquent prose there were zen-like moments of 'suchness' which could be 'teased out' or 'found' and expressed as haiku. Moments Jefferies himself said he sometimes 'lacked the words' [Sic] to express.

3 Found Haiku from the Notebooks of Richard Jefferies

across the meadow

across the meadow

Haiku is a poetic form that captures fleeting moments in nature with simplicity and depth. They often reflect a Zen-like awareness, inviting readers to pause and appreciate the beauty around them emphasising mindfulness and presence in every moment.

Richard Jefferies, widely considered the father of English nature writing, was perhaps the most brilliant observer of nature of the 19th century. His immersive writing intuitively connects us to nature; we become imaginative participants - and 'haiku moments' occur unbidden, as we are drawn in by his eloquence.

And I think that it is this that defines Jefferies' writing, for me at least, his prose resonating with unwitting haiku, waiting to be found ...

across the meadow

across the meadow

Tree Sparrow on Bamboo: Ohara Koson

“There were grass-grown tumuli on the hills to which of old I used to walk, sit down at the foot of one of them, and think. Some warrior had been interred there in the ante-historic times. The sun of the summer morning shone on the dome of sward, and the air came softly up from the wheat below, the tips of the grasses swayed as it passed sighing faintly, it ceased, and the bees hummed by to the thyme and heathbells.” . . .

The Story of My Heart 1883

An allusion perhaps, to Bashō’s haiku[4] - though meant more to show that Jefferies approached the world around him with a similar sensibility.

[4] A haiku by Bashō (1644-1694) - the most celebrated Japanese haiku poet - translated by Jane Reichhold 1937-2016

across the meadow

across the meadow

summer grasses dreaming the dreams of warriors

across the meadow

across the meadow

Summer grass
the only remains of soldiers'
dreams

“‘There’s the cuckoo!’ Everyone looked up and listened as the notes came indoors from the copse by the garden. He had returned to the same spot for the fourth time. The tallest birch-tree—it is as tall as an elm—stands close to the hedge, about three parts of the way up it, and it is just round there that the cuckoo generally sings. From the garden gate it is only a hundred yards to this tree, walking beside the hedge which extends all the way, so that the very first time the cuckoo calls upon his arrival he is certain to be heard. His voice travels that little distance with ease, and can be heard in every room.”

The Hills and the Vale (1909)

across the meadow

sunshine filling every room the cuckoo’s call

across the meadow

across the meadow

There is a spirituality in his writing too, suggestive of an ‘animist’ approach to nature. He clearly felt that all things—plants, animals, stones, even weather—are sentient and alive. And once described the downs as being ‘alive with the dead’.

“… there was magic in everything, in the blades of grass and the stars, the sun and the stones upon the ground” [5]

All of which of course lends itself to haiku which too has its roots in animism.

I’ve always felt at one with nature (and the

wider Universe). The warrior buried in the

mound is as real to me now as it was to

Richard Jefferies then. And so my haiku

story begins. But I'm getting ahead of

myself. Perhaps it all really started way

back in childhood all those years ago.

across the meadow

across the meadow

across the meadow

Coate Reservoir

punctuating time

'… long, long time ago, I can still remember …' go the lyrics to American Pie ("The Day the Music Died") by Don Mclean. I remember watching the news of the plane crash in 1959, when Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens, and The Big Bopper died. I used to sing along to Buddy Holly songs – well when I say sing that's probably stretching it a bit. The Headmaster said I was tone deaf and banned me from the choir. You'll just have to imagine my rendering of 'Peggy Sue'! But I digress; I remember because it also

marked a huge change in my life as we

had recently moved from the country to

the suburbs of Bath. I hated change and

couldn’t handle the move at all for years

after … Even now, especially in spring,

just like mole I get a hankering to revisit

my old home. Long gone now, replaced

across the meadow

across the meadow

OBJ

across the meadow

My childhood home -1950

by an ‘architect designed des res’ but still it pulls me.
I was at home there playing in the woods and fields. Sometimes I’d be out all day; waking with the birds – sparrows, always sparrows chattering from under the eaves, and twittering from a nearby ash[6] (and if I was lucky, a green woodpecker or cuckoo calling). And only coming in, reluctantly, as the owls began hooting, and the blackbird had sung his last song.
Going to bed had its own challenges. While the outdoors held no horrors even in the dark, my bedroom lit only by a single oil lamp, had lots of spooky corners. And a wardrobe. Scary! Even the patterns on the wallpaper seemed to move.

6 These would have been tree sparrows

across the meadow

across the meadow

OBJ

across the meadow

waking up
the sounds of the day
waking up
punctuating time
a blackbird's song

shadows on the wall chasing sleep

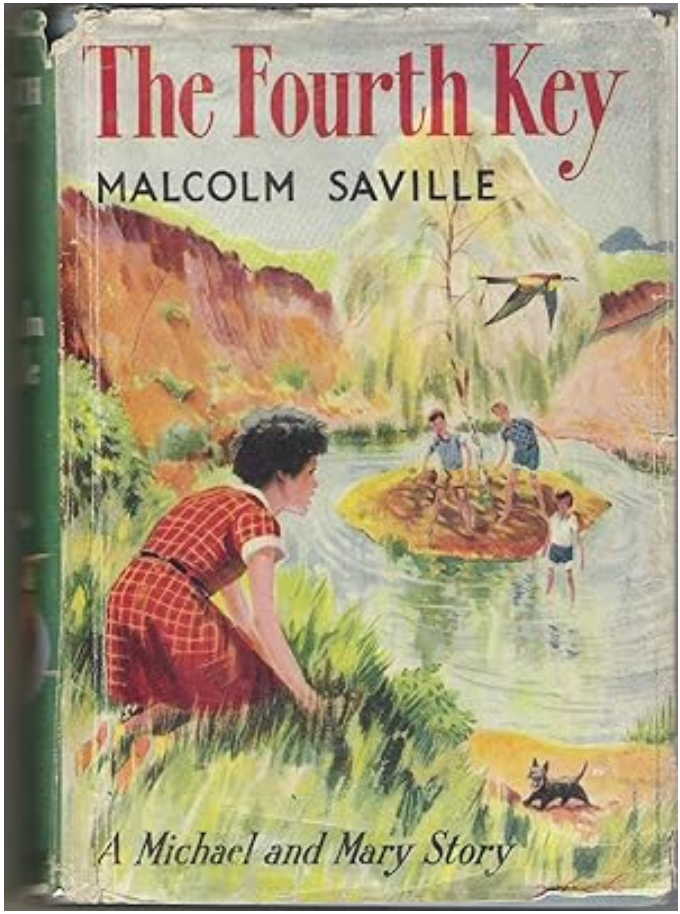
Was I lonely – I don't think so. Or did I 'learn to be lonely' as in the Andrew Lloyd Webber's song from Phantom of the Opera.
I was, I suppose, a precocious child. I could read and spell, even quite difficult words like 'intelligence', before starting school, but struggled with writing and arithmetic.
I hated school! I didn't fit. Had few friends. And thought and behaved differently. I spent an awful lot of time reading or staring out the window …
This book got me into a lot of trouble but also inspired and fed my passion for watching birds (and ultimately writing haiku about birds) that was to last a lifetime. Here I recount the experience, as read to my son many many years later, in the form of a haibun.

across the meadow

across the meadow

Let me read it for you - the haibun not the book - though I'm open to offers … !

OBJ



across the meadow

across the meadow

Hidden

I turned the page.

[…] "'I have amazing news for you – and indeed for every bird-lover in the country,'" he whispered. […]

It was my first day at Junior (Primary) school and I had picked a book to read, from the library shelves.

"Bennett! What are you doing ?"

"Reading, Miss" (I hadn't heard the Headmistress come into class). "We were told to", Miss.

"What have I been talking about?"

"Dunno, Miss."

across the meadow

“Come here!” (six raps on the knuckles for not paying attention and six more for answering back).
“Write out, in your best handwriting, ‘I must not read in class’. Twelve times!”
Did she know that my writing was awful. I could read, and spell almost anything, but write – I couldn’t write for toffee.
I returned to my desk and stared out the window; a Green Woodpecker flew up into the trees bordering the grounds of the old Rectory. Overgrown and unkempt – a place of mystery and adventure.
I sneaked a look at the next page …

across the meadow

across the meadow

Sparrows on Bamboo: Ohara Koson

[…] “‘As I suspected, the birds you saw and which I have been watching for fifteen minutes are Bee-eater.’”[…]
The bell rang …

across the meadow

across the meadow

morning assembly
sparrows chattering
in the playground

Daydreaming

The swinging ‘60s. Bob Dylan, the Beatles and Birds! No not the mini-skirted ones hanging out, downtown, in parks and city streets, nor the collared dove, though I was seduced for a while. And a pretty girl can still turn my head today. Think Felise in the novel – ‘The Dewy Morn’ by Richard Jefferies.

“Felise walked up out of the water on to the turf and sat down at the edge of the shadow of the trees. … She thought of nothing but the sun and wind, the flowers and the running stream. She listened to the wind in the trees and began herself to sing – singing of ‘the woven embroidery of the earth’ threaded into her very being …”

Pure beauty (of imagination). And nothing to do with sex! Well maybe it is. I don’t know but that’s all you’re going to get. Now back to birds.

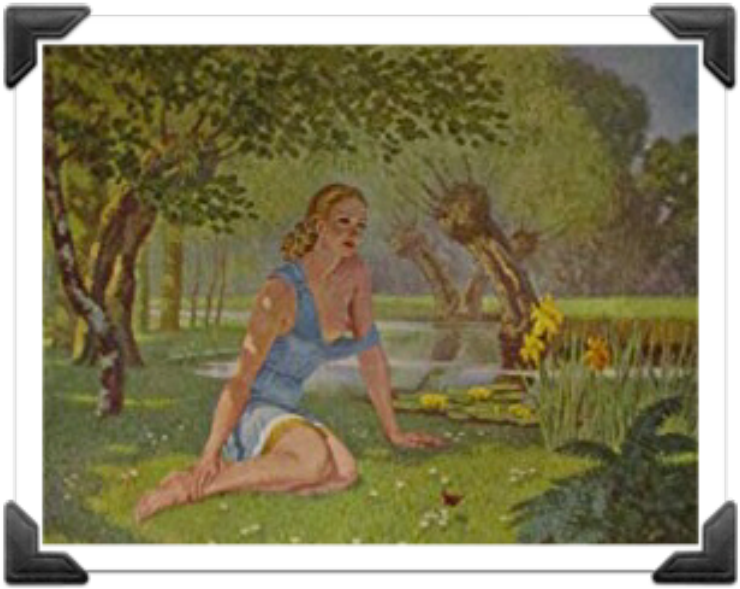
across the meadow

across the meadow

OBJ

across the meadow

across the meadow



Beauty is Immortal 1948

I saw plenty of birds on the local allotments – the only bit of green anyways near a stones throw of our new home. It became my ‘local patch’. I ticked off most of the commoner birds – blackbird, song thrush, woodpigeon, dunnock blue and great tits, chaffinch, goldfinch, whitethroat – and yellowhammers. It was also on my way to school – well sort of. I was often late!

But there were distractions at school too. No not girls. Well maybe!

I had a sort of crush on my music teacher – she was kind and beautiful. I imagined her a bit like Felise. She seemed to know how I pined for the woods and fields of my early childhood.

across the meadow

OBJ

across the meadow

across the meadow

daydreaming
waiting for the bell
my piano tutor
humming along
to Beethoven's fifth

Even today, whenever I hear the song of a yellowhammer (or Beethoven's fifth), it takes me back across the years, to the fields I'd left behind (and a lost love).

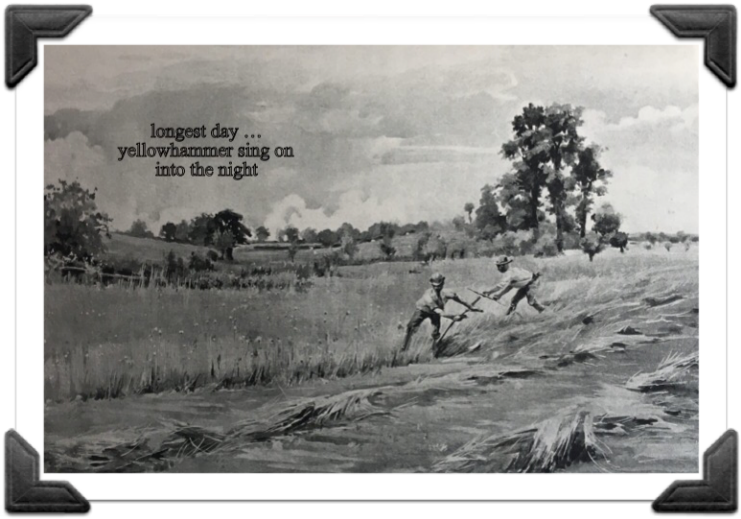
across the meadow

[…] ‘There is sunshine in the song – and whose colour, like that of the wild flowers and the sky, has never faded from my memory. His [Yellowhammer] plumage gives a life and tint to the hedge, contrasting so brightly with the vegetation and with other birds. His song is but a few bars repeated, yet it has a pleasing and soothing effect in the drowsy warmth of summer.’ […]

An excerpt from Wildlife in a Southern County Richard Jefferies 1879

OBJ

across the meadow



Grass Meadows Coate

There was a lake too, a short cycle ride away, where in the summer hols, I would go to watch birds. And think! At one end there was an old church idyllically located on it's own Island with a little stone bridge over the moat …
Colin kindly commented – "This is, dare I say, 'perfect' (as perfect as these things ever are) where 'reflection' means two things at the same time – something on the water and meditation interrupted by the conceptual fish that often disrupts ordinary thinking in everyday life."
And on days when midsummer clouds scudded across the sky, I would sit under some willows and read Richard Jefferies – a kindred spirit who seemed to think and feel the way I did.
They say that schooldays are the best days of your life. I'm not so sure. But they were a hell of a lot better than the following years.

across the meadow

across the meadow

across the meadow

still waters
a fish jumps … through
my reflection

coot skitter
among lily pads
summer rain

OBJ

across the meadow

Perhaps it’s time for a break - so grab a coffee or pour another cuppa (you can never have too much tea!) and have a listen to this 11 minute piece of music by Frank Bridge: 'Two Poems for Orchestra', written in 1915 and inspired by Richard Jefferies.

OBJ

across the meadow

across the meadow

Performed by the London Philarmonic Orchestra
conducted by Nicholas Braithwaite

In darkening skies

They were awful years. Working in a 9-5 office job ripped the heart and soul out of me. As someone born of the outdoors – the claustrophobic spaces, the bright lights the noise and people, so many people – was unbearable! When I could, I would bunk off and go for long walks across the fields, or up on the hills and downs, with Richard Jefferies my guide and companion. And think thoughts.

"Stepping up the hill laboriously, suddenly a lark starts into the light and pours forth a rain of unwearied notes overhead. With bright light, and sunshine, and sunrise, and blue skies the bird is so associated in the mind, that even to see him in the frosty days of winter, at least assures us that summer will certainly return."[7]

[7] Out of Doors in February 1882

across the meadow

across the meadow

across the meadow

across the meadow

up on the downs a skylark takes me higher

Sometimes, in late summer or early autumn, I'd stay up on the downs and watch the stars appear, one by one – mirrored by the cottage lights in the valley far below …

It was a strange feeling. Being caught between two worlds – marvelling in awe and wonder at the infinite beauty of the night sky, yet comforted and reassured by the human presence below. A lone curlew's call a portal between the two.

But in spring and early summer, still waking with the birds, even on a work day, I would walk across the fields to the river … listening to the birdsong. Neither night nor day, there was a tangible change in the air and an imperceptible, almost subliminal lightening of the sky.

across the meadow

OBJ

across the meadow

lights twinkle
in darkening skies
a curlew's cry

Jakob Siecke plays Messiaen - Le Courlis Cendre

"… Now and again the blackbird feels the beauty of the time, the large white daisy stars, the grass with yellow-dusted tips, the air which comes so softly unperceived by any precedent rustle of the hedge, the water which runs slower, held awhile by rootlet, flag, and forget-me-not. He feels the beauty of the time and he must say it. The blackbird's whistle is like a human being playing the flute; an uncertain player, now drawing forth a bar of a beautiful melody and then losing it again. … It strives to express the singer's keen delight, the singer's exquisite appreciation of the loveliness of the days; the golden glory of the meadow, the light, the luxurious shadows, the indolent clouds reclining on their azure couch. His notes come like wild flowers, not sown in order. The sunshine opens and shuts the stops of his instrument."[8]

[8] The Coming of Summer

across the meadow

across the meadow

OBJ

across the meadow

across the meadow

sunny days tease a blackbird's song

And on weekends I would roam the fields, woods and water-meadows, all the day long, as I did when a child.

"Butterflies flutter over the mowing grass, hardly clearing the bennets. Many multi-coloured insects creep up the sorrel stems and take wing from the summit. Everything gives forth a sound of life. The twittering of swallows from above, the song of greenfinches in the trees, the rustle of hawthorn sprays moving under the weight of tiny creatures, the buzz upon the breeze; the very flutter of the butterflies' wings, noiseless as it is, and the wavy movement of the heated air across the field cause a sense of motion and of music."[9]

9 An extract from Jefferies' essay, 'Woodlands', from 'Nature Near London 1883

across the meadow

across the meadow

OBJ

a warm wind across the meadow the hum of bees

across the meadow

across the meadow

Now, many many years later, happily married (I met my darling wife through work so it can't have been all bad) with grown up kids, my early morning walks and introspection, have been, and continue to be, a rich source for my haiku.
Looking for inspiration! Why don't you join me some fine morning - or at least fling open the window andt listen, just for a moment, to the birds … waking up.
Scan the QR Code to your smartphone to listen to some of the (British) birds you may hear, in your garden or on a spring walk in the countryside. Or follow the link. You can even create your own Dawn Chorus!

across the meadow

across the meadow

across the meadow

Tree Sparrows in Rain: Ohara Koson

beyond the stars

So why did I start writing haiku – I wasn't a poet and didn't read poetry. Wait! Haven't we been here before. I wasn't a writer either – although I had tried my hand at a couple of creative non-fiction pieces for bird watching magazines. But then a period of enforced rest, after major surgery, got me thinking about life – as you do – it's transience!

All I could really do was read (I'm not a TV or Netflix person). And think. I'm quite good at thinking. So back to reading Richard Jefferies and thinking about life. In my youth I had walked the same hills, downs, woods and meadows as he had – and sometimes in some quiet corner of a meadow or a wind blown hilltop I could (almost) feel his thoughts.

across the meadow

This then was when I happened upon Colin's book – Something beyond the Stars (1993). A book of Found Haiku from the Notebooks of Richard Jefferies.
So to help pass the time, I started looking for 'found' haiku in some of Jefferies' other works. This is beginning to feel like it's turning into a monologue on the life and works of Richard Jefferies. But I find his books a constant source of inspiration. Many of my haiku have started life in his writings and essays – so I make no apologies for yet more haiku intuited from his words …
For Richard Jefferies the freedom of a bird's life was appealing, as was a bird's ability to live in tune with its surroundings and take delight in the natural rhythms and beauties of the seasons.

across the meadow

across the meadow

Jefferies' passion for birds shines through his text. His description of a whitethroat and kestrel, like no other, and probably never equalled. …

[…] "Suddenly he crosses to the tops of the hawthorn and immediately flings himself up into the air a yard or two, his wings and ruffled crest making a ragged outline; jerk, jerk, jerk, as if it were with the utmost difficulty he could keep even at that height. He scolds, and twitters, and chirps, and all at once sinks like a stone into the hedge and out of sight as a stone into a pond."[…][10]

But is there a haiku to be 'found' …

across the meadow

OBJ

across the meadow

bursting through his song a whitethroat

Coate Farm

[…] “Presently a small swift shadow passes across—it is that of a hawk flying low over the hill. He skirts it for some distance, and then shoots out into the air, comes back half-way, and hangs over the fallow below, where there is a small rick. His wings vibrate, striking the air downwards, and only slightly backwards, the tail depressed counteracting the inclination to glide forwards for awhile. In a few moments he slips, as it were, from his balance, but brings, himself up again in a few yards, turning a curve so as to still hover above the rick.” […][11]

But ‘finding’ haiku, fun and somewhat

addictive as it is, isn't like actually writing

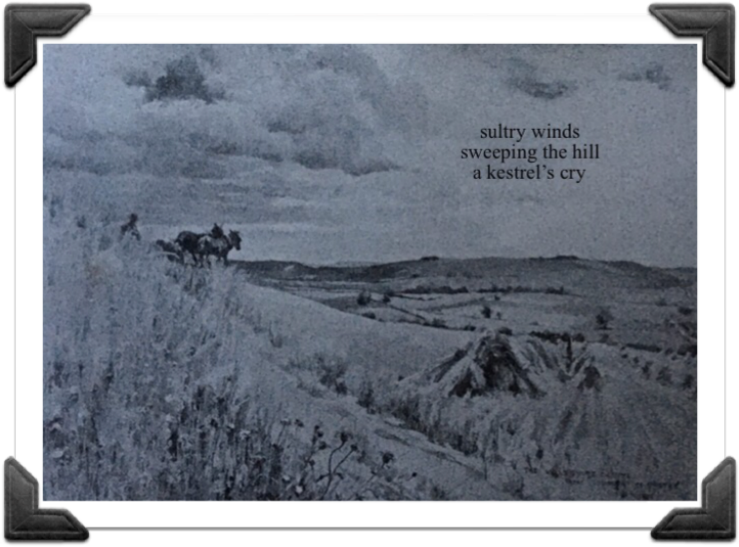
haiku – not really, is it. So back to my

reading …

11 Wild Life in a Southern County (1879)

across the meadow

across the meadow



The Wiltshire Downs from Liddington Castle

across the meadow

across the meadow

easy listening

Still having to take it easy I read haiku, loads of haiku – learning about the fragment and phrase, use of space, juxtaposition, kigo and cutting words or kireji.

One book stood out, not because it was a weighty tome on haiku, but because it was about birds in haiku – 'Wing Beats: British Birds in Haiku' by John Barlow and Matthew Paul, published by Snapshot Press. I knew about birds, their songs and behaviour their jiz – what made them tick as it were. So this became my go to book for all things haiku.

Hyper-focussed now on finding out all there was to know about haiku, I also read about haiku techniques by the late Jane Reichhold – sense switching, the use of metaphor and simile, wordplay and the above as below technique.

across the meadow

across the meadow

across the meadow

across the meadow

easy listening
a woodpigeon croons
an old favourite

But it was Paul Chambers the then editor of the Wales Haiku Journal, and award winning haiku poet, who took my very naive, gawkish first attempts at writing haiku and helped me work them up into something worthy of publishing. Here they are …

If I'm writing at least half-way credible haiku today it is because of his patience, encouragement and ultimately belief. I can't thank him enough.

And then a light bulb moment I read the Poetic Spell by Martin Lucas (1962 – 2014), founder and editor of Presence, and a friend and colleague of John Barlow and Matthew Paul. A fellow birdwatcher he has had a lasting influence on my haiku writing …

What did he mean by poetic spell.

…. words that chime; words that beat; words that flow. And once you've truly heard it, you won't forget it, because the words have

power. They are not dead and scribbled on a

page, they are spoken like a charm; and they

across the meadow

OBJ
OBJ
OBJ

across the meadow

red skies—
from wind-tossed trees
stormcock sing

squally showers
sweeping the saltings
the peewit's cry

drifting snow
shattering the silence
a wren's song

aren't read, they're heard. You can hold them in the light and turn them about and watch each of their facets gleam. They begin and end each reader's unique reflection …

And finally back to Bashō and his concept of karumi. Like so many of Bashō's critical terms, karumi defies easy definition. Essentially meaning a lightness of touch, stressing simplicity and leanness, relaxed, rhythmical, seemingly artless expression leaving a space for the reader to become an imaginative participant. It also implies rhythm and attention to the poetry of the ear, especially those sound patterns that generate emotional connotations.[12]

Not every haiku will have this but it's worth striving for. In the end some poems just work …It's very much your poem – wherever you lay your head!

[12] Heavily paraphrased from 'Traces of Dreams: Landscape, Cultural Memory, and the Poetry of Bashō' (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998, by Haruo Shirane).

across the meadow

across the meadow

OBJ

OBJ

across the meadow

first light the pink of chaffinch in
the cherry

waking up
the sounds of the day
waking up

Swallows with Cherry Blossom: Ohara Koson

PART TWO
among the driftwood

My haiku have been variously described as ‘transcendental’ – ‘inspiring, interesting, and brilliantly written.’ Like ‘love letters to nature’ – ‘conjuring many layers of loveliness, with the lightness of gently falling leaves’. Such beautiful words to treasure. Thank you![13]

If you’d like to know a little more about me and how I became a haiku poet, assuming you haven’t read that part already, then here’s a link – across the meadow – which will take you back to the start of my haiku story.

So put the kettle on and make a brew – or pour your favourite tipple. Play some music,[14] to set the mood and let’s settle down to read some haiku.

[13] Josie Holford, Isabella Kramer, Jodie Hawthorne, and Rosalind Maud)

[14] “Nature” - Music by Aleksandr Shamaluev AShamaluevMusic

among the driftwood

among the driftwood

OBJ

among the driftwood

Moon and Cherry Tree: Ohara Koson

It’s ok there’s no one listening. Well maybe the cat. And don’t forget the chocolate biscuits.

‘Haiku along with other poems deserve more than one reading. If possible, they should be read aloud. While they often spark immediate recognition and appreciation, they give up their full meanings more slowly. They are, in fact, the most compressed of all poems. I like to think that means they are charged with extra energy and vitality. Certainly, they engage the reader as a co-creator.’ – Peggy Willis Lyles (1939 – 2010).

So gently shoosh the cat out of the chair and when you’re ready!

Here’s an early tanka-bun (or tanbun) for starters …

among the driftwood

Magpie Roost

Coming back from a late evening walk at
the tail end of summer I paused by an old
farm gate and gazed out over the rough
grazing and willow scrub …
… and then they came – one for
sorrow, two for joy … twenty, thirty,
a hundred, two hundred – from all
directions. I lost count …
And still they came but by then it was too
dark to see …

dusk settling
across the marsh
counting crows
a nursery rhyme
long forgotten

among the driftwood

among the driftwood

among the driftwood

Intentionally blank

among the driftwood

Tree Sparrows in Flight: Ohara Koson

among the driftwood

A short sequence using sound on sound and visual imagery to enhance a sense of place. Quite a common theme in my haiku …

OBJ

among the driftwood

among the driftwood

above the river beat drumming snipe

somewhere—
a redshank call
lost in the fog

swift scream
down cobbled streets

bikers follow
the pulsing beat
of a cruising car

OBJ

among the driftwood

---

moonlit nights

harvest moon hidden by clouds a
plovers call

flower moon
her scent of jasmine
in every room

backlighting

a cloudy night ...
blood moon

OBJ

among the driftwood

among the driftwood

night fishing
a heron stalks the
hunters moon

winter moon
a twinkle in the
snowman's eye

eating more than we should
strawberry moon

---

moonlit nights

Oh and if you haven't already twigged
most of my haiku are about birds – these
two (both tanka), written for my wife Jan,
perhaps being the exception …

among the driftwood

OBJ

OBJ

among the driftwood

on the beach
a stolen moment
hand in hand
among the driftwood
a mermaids purse

waking up
… next to you
waking up
we snuggle back down
under the covers

among the driftwood

Sometimes my haiku (senryu)
stray into the realm of social
commentary … a wry look at life

OBJ
OBJ
OBJ

among the driftwood

among the driftwood

dossing among
the cardboard boxes
a homeless dog

dodging traffic jackdaws finish my
breakfast croissant

white noise
my darkest thoughts
on loop ...

among the driftwood

among the driftwood

taking tea with grandma

she reads the leaves

hide-and-seek
in the churchyard
a new headstone
a wren betrays
my hiding place

all hallows' eve
blackbirds seeing ghosts
in every bush

among the driftwood

among the driftwood

OBJ

among the driftwood

Snowdonia

wild camping
a robin joins us
for breakfast

the bark of a raven echoing … the silence

best of friends
… beside the fire
teenage crush

among the driftwood

among the driftwood

raven tumble
from snow-filled skies
winter games

cold moon the heron's frozen
shadow

fresh snow
drifting from the sky
winter swans

Snowdonia

OBJ

among the driftwood

among the driftwood

skipping stones one two three
fourfivesixseveneight

OBJ

among the driftwood

morning milking
… wagtails skitter
around the yard

wagtails …
playing hopscotch
after school

among the driftwood

among the driftwood

after the storm
gathering windfalls ...
pinkfeet calling

among the driftwood

among the driftwood

among the windfalls a chaffinch nest

overnight redwings among the windfalls

While writing this I'm reminded that the festive season is fast approaching; Christmas trees, laden with baubles and twinkling lights, can be seen popping up in shop windows all over the country and it won't be long before we start coming home to find Christmas cards lying on the doormat. One of the strongest associations between robins and Christmas cards can be traced back to the days of the Victorian postie. For a time, Royal Mail postmen wore bright red uniforms which soon earned them the nickname 'robins'.

As the exchange of Christmas cards grew in popularity, depictions of robins holding cards in their beaks began to appear. A trend was born and, over a century later, robins are still one of the most favoured images on the market[15].

15 Source: The Christmas robin – Sound and vision blog

among the driftwood

among the driftwood

under his breath
winter robins
… posing early
for Christmas
our postie hums
lights twinkle

in every house
a robin on the
mantle
a favourite carol
distant bells
deep in the holly
robin song

---

songs from the wood

OBJ
OBJ
OBJ

among the driftwood

Now still with a winter theme here is something really special. Just listen to the music inspired by these haiku - Distant Hills (Naviar Records #478) …This selected track composed by ‘zenbytes’. Not everybody’s taste but you gotta love the creativity!

And here’s two of the haiku (senryu) put to music made by Suno (AI) Music …

OBJ

OBJ

among the driftwood

among the driftwood

winter solitude
the fading shadow
of my footprints
distant hills beyond the gate
winter stillness
drifting snow
the only sound
my footsteps

deep midwinter

among the driftwood

Winter can drag on a bit here and, at the edge of the wood, in shadow, the blackthorn winter lingers, often well into April. But a couple of warm days in late February or early March and before you

know it …
Perhaps a similar observation to that of Busons' (1716 - 1783) ...
In nooks and corners
Cold remains:
Flowers of the plum
(translated by RH Blyth)

among the driftwood

hanging out
our winter woolies
first swallow

primroses in the hedgerow bank a
robin's nest

wind blown
across the fields
cuckoo song

Acknowledgements

Well that's it! You were great company. Thanks for reading. Should you wish to leave a review or comment or have any questions about the book you can contact me directly via the link below. Just tap on my signature. I'd love to hear from you …

Thanks especially to editors – Paul Chambers and Joe Woodhouse (Wales Haiku Journal), Caroline Skanne (hedgerow: a journal of small poems), and Alan Summers (The Pan Haiku Review/Blo͞o Outlier Journal) who gave me so much help and encouragement and were the first to publish many of the haiku included here.

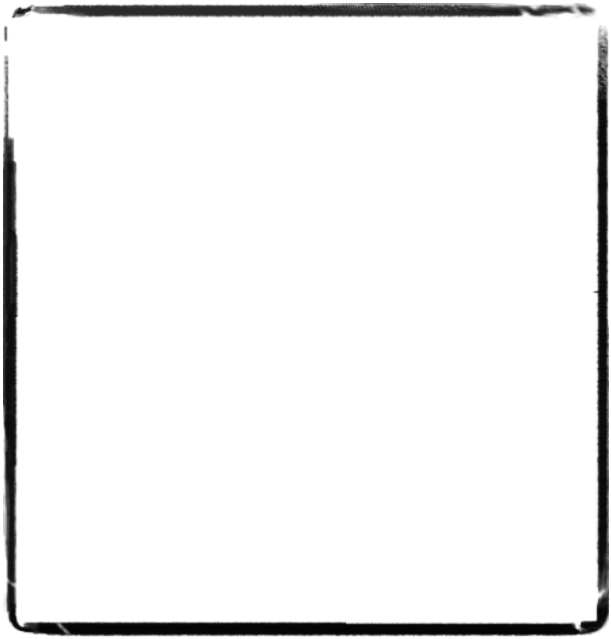
I'm not a prolific writer of haiku so it's been an honour to have some of them taken up by other well known journals. Thanks then to the editors of …

failed haiku – a journal of English Senryu

Presence Haiku Journal
first frost – journal of haiku & senryu
tsuri-dōrō – a small journal of haiku, senryū
Scarlet Dragonfly Journal
Charlotte Digregorio's The Daily Blog
民句 folk ku: a journal in honour of Masaoka Shiki
With special thanks to Richard Grahn Founder, Drifting Sands Haibun, without whom none of this would have been possible. And to Jodie Hawthorne of King River Press whose energy and enthusiasm for following her own dreams inspired me to follow mine.
To my sister Viv for constant encouragement. And of course to my wife, Jan and son and daughter, Hugo and Bea, who endure and sometimes even like my poetry. This book is for you.

OBJ OBJ

For my Dad
(Made with Suno AI Music - mixed and produced in Mixpad)



in memoriam
we never talked
undiagnosed
a difficult child
if only he knew
the hurt inside
not knowing myself

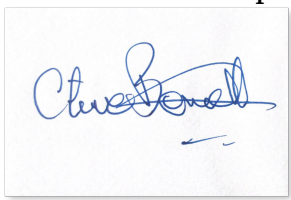
In Memoriam

OBJ

OBJ

‘I’m older than I look … and younger than I am’

Author photo (from a few years ago)



The Author

Reviews

Just love this collection so much. So many funny moments within your prose, it's very light and whimsical. A real pleasure to read … Jodie Hawthorne - Founder and editor of King River Press and 民句 folk ku: a journal in honour of Masaoka Shiki

Imaginative intriguing and unique … Caroline Skanne - Founder and editor of hedgerow: a journal of small poems

I love the haiku and your honesty, but I especially love the bird song recordings … Louise Hastings - English Teacher Writer and Poet

Your book is AMAZING! A book I shall treasure and return to again and again … Lesley Scoble - A multi-talented artist with a career spanning acting, painting,

stage production, book illustration, and filmmaking.

A charming book - beautifully presented … James Gilbert - Naturalist, Ecologist, and writer

One of most sophisticated and handsome deliveries of material I've ever seen …Jerome Berglund - Fine art/ fashion photographer and prodigious writer of haiku senryu and all forms of Japanese short form poetry

Absolutely beautiful book … Christina Chin. An award winning poet of haiku haiga, photo-haiku and shahai. Widely published in print and online with several reputable anthologies and journals.

Appendix

Growing up I used to collect the natural history picture cards that came with packets of Brooke Bond tea and stick them in a sketch pad with notes about each bird, encouraged enthusiastically by my mum. This appendix featuring some of the birds in my poems brings my hobby into the digital age.

The illustrations by Léo-Paul Robert (1851 - 1923) have been sourced through the Biodiversity Heritage Library from the original book - Les oiseaux dans la nature : 50 monographies d'oiseaux utiles / Eugène Rambert - held by the American Museum of Natural History Library). They are reproduced here in the photo-album format typical of his books, but are otherwise as originally scanned (2008)

The bird recordings have been digitally remastered from my original shellac records (‘Songs of Wild Birds’ and ‘More Songs of Wild Birds’ - 1936/1937), by Ludwig Koch and apart from light editing to reduce some of the noise, remain faithful to the original recordings.
Where my records were too badly scratched or warped digital copies were downloaded from Sound & Science - an online database for the history of acoustics.
So finally here is my short collection of ‘birds in haiku’. A lifetime in the making it seems a fitting conclusion to this book. I’ve come full circle as it were.
Thanks Mum!

The Skylark

birds in haiku

birds in haiku

Male skylarks can be spotted rising almost vertically from farmland, grassland, salt-marshes and moorland. They hover effortlessly, singing from a great height, before parachuting back down to earth. These long and complicated song-flights can last for up to an hour and the birds can reach 300m before descending. They'll also sing from perches, such as fence posts or large rocks.

higher than our highest kite skylarks

birds in haiku

A familiar thrush, the melodious blackbird is a common sight in

gardens, parks and woodlands

across the UK. Blackbirds are

especially fond of feeding on lawns

and can be seen with their heads

cocked to one side, listening for

earthworms. They also feed on

insects and berries - leave out a few

old apples or plant berry-producing

bushes in the garden to attract these

delightful birds.

birds in haiku

The Blackbird

birds in haiku

birds in haiku

The Whitethroat

birds in haiku

birds in haiku

The whitethroat is a medium-sized,

long-tailed warbler of grassland,

scrub and hedgerows. It is a summer

visitor and passage migrant, breeding

in many areas, but avoiding urban

and mountainous places. Males

whitethroats build nests out of twigs

and roots and the females then

decide which to take. whitethroats

winter in Africa, leaving our shores in

early October and heading as far as

South Africa.

birds in haiku

The diminutive wren can be found in

almost any habitat where there are

insects to eat and bushes or rock

crevices in which to build their domed

nest out of moss and twigs. In fact,

the wren is the most common

breeding bird in in the UK; there are

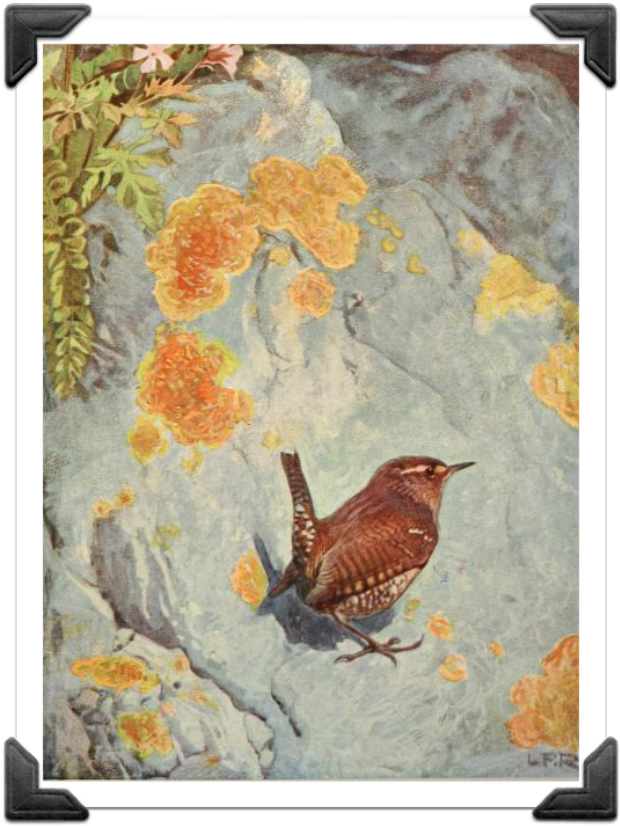
currently 8.6 million breeding wren

territories. It is scarcer in northern

England and Scotland and upland

areas.

birds in haiku



The Wren

birds in haiku

birds in haiku

The Chaffinch

birds in haiku

birds in haiku

The chaffinch is a very common,

sparrow-sized finch of gardens,

woodland, parks and farmland.

Chaffinches build neat, bowl-shaped

nests in trees and shrubs. They feed

on seeds and insects and will happily

visit birdtables, but do not feed

openly on feeders, preferring to hop

about on the ground and under

hedges instead. Chaffinches are

present all year-round and more than

6 million pairs breed here in summer.

They have a loud, pleasant song.

birds in haiku

Our smallest crow, the jackdaw is a bird of woodland, parkland, coasts and urban areas - so you're just as likely to see one in our city streets, cathedral precinct, or a McDonalds car park, as you are in ancient woodlands.

lunch break a jackdaw catches my eye

They are gregarious and highly social birds mating for life and uniquely use their (silver grey-white) eyes to communicate with each other – and with us too and can recognise human faces and respond to our expressions.

Often seen in loose flocks, performing

aerial acrobatics, jackdaws seem to revel

in strong blustery winds. Like other crows

they gather at night in large roosts and

form impressive displays, called a

clattering, their loud 'kya' calls keeping

them together.

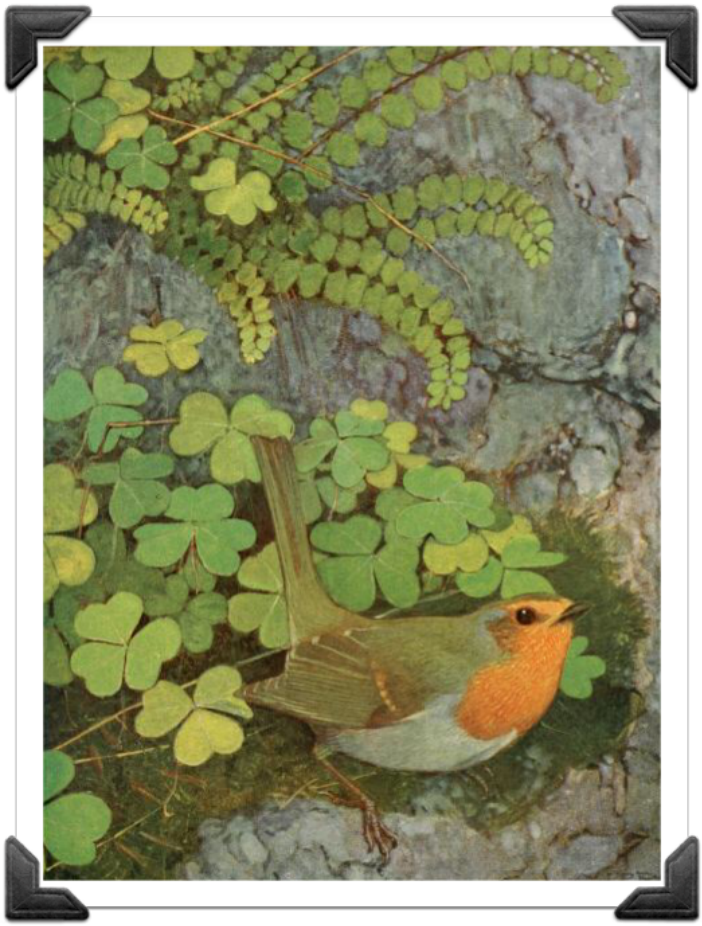
birds in haiku

The Jackdaw

birds in haiku

birds in haiku

OBJ



The Robin

birds in haiku

birds in haiku

The robin is one of the most familiar

birds of the UK, regularly visiting

gardens. Robins are also common in

parks, scrub and woodland, making

their presence known with a loud,

territorial song. They sing from

prominent perches right through the

winter, when both males and females

hold territories; indeed, they are

fiercely territorial, driving off intruders

and even fighting. During the

breeding season, the female is

allowed into the male's territory

where she sets up a nest of dead

leaves, moss and hair. Nests often

crop up in the oddest of places, such

as plant pots, old wellies and

shelves, but Ivy and other shrubs are

their natural choice.

birds in haiku

A common and familiar bird, the pied

wagtail is often seen in towns and

cities, dashing across lawns, roads

and car parks while wagging its long

tail up and down. Pied wagtails eat

insects, but will feed on seeds and

even rubbish in winter. They flock

together at warm roost sites like

reedbeds and sewage works or trees

and bushes in city centres. In

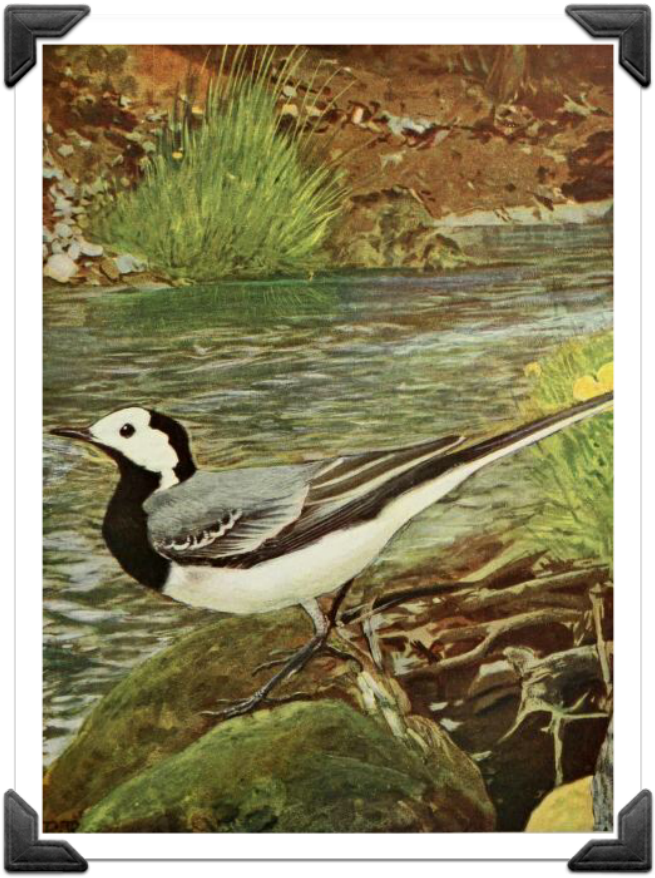
summer, they defend breeding

territories and will nest in ivy, under

roofs, in walls, between stones ... in

all kinds of places!

birds in haiku



The White Wagtail

birds in haiku

birds in haiku

The Swallow

birds in haiku

birds in haiku

The swallow, or 'barn swallow', is a

common summer visitor, arriving in

April and leaving in October. It builds

mud and straw nests on ledges, often

in farm buildings and outhouses, or

under the eaves of houses. Swallows

are widespread and common birds of

farmland and open pasture near

water. They are agile fliers, feeding

on flying insects while on the wing.

Before they migrate back to their

wintering grounds in Africa, they can

be seen gathering to roost in

wetlands, particularly reedbeds.

birds in haiku

A cuckoo is a summer visitor to Britain, arriving from Africa in late March and April. They are famous for laying their eggs in other birds' nests, fooling them into raising their young. Dunnocks, meadow pipits and reed warblers are common victims of this. Young cuckoo chicks grow much bigger than their unsuspecting foster parents and will often push any other eggs out of the nest. Young and adult cuckoos like to eat all kinds of insects, but hairy caterpillars are their favourites!

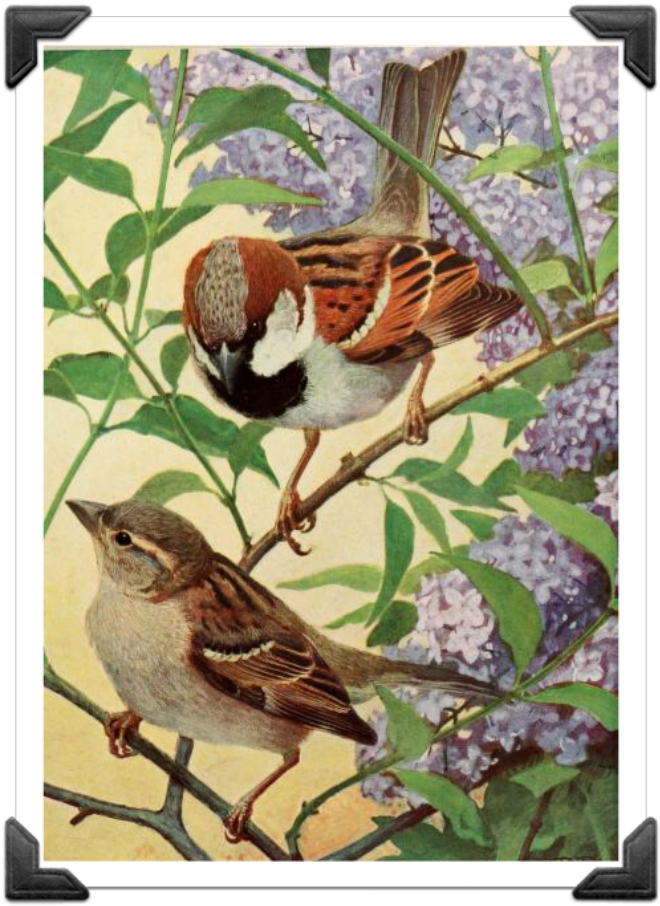
birds in haiku

The Cuckoo

birds in haiku

birds in haiku

OBJ



The House Sparrow

birds in haiku

birds in haiku

The house sparrow is an

opportunistic bird of towns and cities,

parks, gardens and farmland. House

sparrows feed on a variety of foods,

including buds, grains, nuts and

scraps, and will visit birdtables and

feeders. They live in colonies and

nest in holes or crevices in buildings,

among Ivy or other bushes, and in

nestboxes; they use a variety of

materials to make their nests. Both

parents will incubate the three to five

eggs and raise the young. House

sparrows are residents in the UK, but

may disperse from their breeding

grounds to feed on nearby farmland

and grassland in winter

birds in haiku

The last word …

And if that wasn't enough you can read these and more of my poems in my eclectic ongoing online collection here (PDF) … hidden by clouds

And that as they say really is it …

the end: silence!